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ABSTRACT

Relatively little research has focused on the lives of black girls, even though they are represented in groups whose conditions are of grave social concern. Research on the educational needs of black girls might employ some of the following approaches. To establish priorities for research, the Gurins' 1970 review, "Expectancy Theory in the Study of Poverty" provides a practical model that compares what is learned from experimental studies with the aspirations of practical programs to solve problems. Another promising approach to developing research topics is called "mental stripping," and is exemplified by Janice Porter Gump's 1978 paper, "Reality and Myth: Employment and the Role of Ideology in Black Women." Gump combined literature review with historical analysis and discussion of her own experiences as a Black woman. Areas of research that might be treated this way are black girls' aspirations and preparation for work and careers. A third approach would be to simply add to the database information that is often overlooked, especially information coming from evaluative studies of social and educational programs and needs assessments. For example, a 1982 evaluation of LINCKS, a Washington, DC, program for pregnant high school students, yielded interesting descriptive data on the black girl subpopulation. None of these three approaches is a substitute for gathering information through empirical investigation, but pursuing them would help place what is already known into perspective. Five pages of references conclude the report. (KH)

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Investigating and Understanding the Educational Needs of Black Girls

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In December 1975, the National Institute of Education (NIE) convened the Conference on the Educational and Occupational Needs of Black Women. The recommendations that emerged from the Conference reflected the participants' concerns that little information of any type existed on the various facets of the lives of black women and girls. Hence the participants called for NIE to stimulate research activities that would provide a solid formulation for further research. Suggested activities included review and analysis of extant data, descriptive studies of the life cycle of contemporary black women, and longitudinal studies of how black girls and women fare in educational institutions.

Seven years have passed since the Conference took place, yet the paucity of research remains. Some signs

suggest positive changes in the state of affairs regarding research on black women. For example, collections of research and essays on black women have been published (Lindsay, 1980; Murray and Scott, 1982; Rodgers-Rose, 1980). However, information on black girls is accumulating at a slow pace. My search of the ERIC data base in June 1981 yielded less than 300 citations, covering roughly a 15 year period. Moreover, the literature gives no evidence that a coherent, purposeful, and incremental process of inquiry is underway. The data base is an amalgam of one-shot studies, intergroup (in contrast to intragroup) comparisons, descriptions of curricula, and interpretative essays. The topics studied are of a diversity that is out of proportion to the number of discrete studies. Theoretical and integrative efforts are virtually nonexistent. A thorough review of that literature would undoubtedly end in the recommendation that additional research be conducted to fill the gaps.

I would endorse such a recommendation. Black girls are no less deserving of serious study than any other population. Moreover, they may be found in groups whose conditions are of grave social concern: unemployed youth, academic underachievers, those who are victims of race and sex discrimination. Research would serve to further our

knowledge of educational processes that contribute to such conditions, improve institutional practice, and inform policy issues.

However, my endorsement would be tempered by considerable pessimism about the prospects for an accelerated, incremental effort. Some of my reservations would stem from the highly idiosyncratic mode that characterizes many aspects of the research process. Investigators are free to pursue any number of methodological and conceptual approaches, using their own interests as a guide. This freedom may produce important breakthroughs when the interests and efforts of many researchers converge. But black girls have not been the topic of choice for a critical mass of researchers. Other resources--such as research funding--are equally scarce.

How can an area of interest be advanced when talent and money are both in short supply? Networking--as the sponsors of this book undertook--is one option. A similar effort is the Minorities and Math Network. The National Institute of Education, through its Women and Minorities Program (now defunct), provided another mechanism: support for programs to increase the supply of researchers who arguably might have among their interests the study of black girls.

In this paper, I will explore a third option: determining where to go from here. This is a familiar strategy. This strategy is comprised of many tactics: among them are theory development, integration of findings in literature reviews, and exploration of scope and boundaries of a domain. Some tactics have been used to address issues about research on educational needs of black girls. Examples include the following:

- Smith's (1982) review, "The Black Female Adolescent: A review of the Educational, Career and Psychological Literature;"
- Stevenson's (1975) overview of findings pertaining to black girls' preparation for the labor market;
- Lightfoot's (1977) review and critique of theoretical and methodological approaches in research on young black girls.
- Hare's (1979) study of self-esteem which suggested that black girls occupy a "psychological middle ground" in reference to black boys, white girls, and white boys.

The following discusses in detail other tactics that might serve as models for advancing the study of the educational needs of black girls. The first two parts describe approaches to the delineation and classification of issues. The third section takes up the use of evaluative studies as ways to increase our knowledge of special populations of black girls.

Delineating Issues

During the 1960s, a tremendous surge of interest began in the expectancies that minorities and the poor have for success and failure. For example, one group of correlational studies explained the basis of expectancy--internal vs. external; the results typically indicated that "disadvantaged" groups believed that external factors, such as chance or fate, affected their chances for success more than internal factors like ability. In contrast, middle-class populations tended to endorse a belief in their own ability to control their lives.

I remember a sense of "Aha, a concept that fits" among my fellow graduate students at Howard. Many of us followed the research on expectancy with great interest, perhaps because these efforts seemed to represent an alternative to studies guided by "tangle of pathology" notions. Such explanations focused on deeply rooted psychological deficits within the poor. In contrast, expectancy theory linked individual characteristics to conditions (such as tasks, opportunities, and feedback) outside the person. Expectancy fit nicely a research focus congruent with the social programs spawned by "The Great Society" and the "War

on Poverty." The rationales for such interventions embraced the idea that if opportunities are expanded, expectancies--and subsequently performance--will improve.

But there comes a point at which descriptions of a domain bogs down and we ask, "Where do we go from here?" That happened with expectancy studies. The Gurins (1970) gave some answers in a review that I believe is a model for analysis of selected topics in the research on black girls.

The review, entitled "Expectancy Theory in the Study of Poverty" examined key findings from descriptive studies of the poor in the context of experimental studies conducted with relatively affluent populations. First, the authors raised questions about the likely effects of improvements in the environment when initial expectancy is both low and externally based. Findings from several, sometimes competing, strands of research suggested that heightened expectancies may not follow directly and simply from situational and opportunity changes: "If poor people suffer from both problems [low expectancy and externally based expectancy], poverty interventions may face a complex mix of expectancy orientations, some facilitating and some minimizing the possible impact of situational changes and success experiences" (p. 94).

Second, the authors asked about possible behavioral consequences that might occur if expectancies were raised. Again, findings from different theoretical orientations--for example, Atkinson's model of achievement motivation--were considered. As the following excerpt shows, the suggestions for research that emerged from the analysis included a set of highly specific questions and their implications for study design.

> ...Over and over in Feather's work we see that success in early trials is positively related to subsequent performance. What we need is a design that lets us see whether this is more true for subjects who respond to success by greatly increasing their personal expectancies than for subjects who have little, if any, expectancy reaction to success. Moreover, the design must also allow us to examine whether the person's initial expectancy conditions his reaction to success and failure and also conditions the effects of his reaction on performance improvement. Does the person with a very low expectancy respond differently to success and failure than one who already has much higher expectancy? And does his reaction to success and failure have different performance implications than it would have if he came to the situation with more self-confidence? (p. 100)

Virtually all of the studies that the Gurins reviewed in these two sections were conducted with middle-class, white college populations. The element that rendered these

analyses pertinent to issues about the poor was the authors' consideration of research needs to inform program design. The intent and design of social programs, such as those to increase the success experiences of the poor in job-related matters, provided a concrete set of conditions from which implications could be drawn for new questions to be asked, the research designs that might answer them, and existing studies that should be conducted with different populations.

This immensely practical perspective--one that seems particularly appropriate in considerations of educational issues--contributed, in my view, to the specificity of the recommendations that were offered. This contrasts with the lists of broad topics to be explored that often follow from reviews that summarize what has turned up in the literature (the reader is referred to one of my own reviews--Murray, 1981--for an example). I do not wish to disparage descriptive reviews--they can serve, for example, to introduce a topic to new audiences. I merely wish to point out that reviews such as the Gurins can be of greater utility when priorities for research are to be established and scarce resources allocated to do the work.

On the educational needs of black girls, there is one research area--self-esteem--that might benefit from an analytical review. By now, many studies have been conducted that compare black girls to other groups, and various explanations have been offered to account for findings that show relatively high levels of self-esteem among black girls (Smith, 1982; Reid, 1982; Porter and Washington, 1979; Harrison, 1977). A small group of studies has examined how differences in self-esteem are related to educational outcomes in black boys and girls (See for example, Hare, 1979; Simmons, 1978), and many educational programs include activities to improve student self concepts (FitzGibbon, 1973; Scheirer & Kraut, 1979).

What are promising directions to pursue next? One suggestion is that studies of intragroup variations are needed (Hare, 1979). However, the pursuit of information on subpopulations of black girls can perhaps be guided by specific questions that have to do with practice and theory. A thoughtful and critical review of the literature, using the approach described above, may be a source of direction.

However, there is a second approach, one that may prove of particular utility for topics that are not as well

developed as self-esteem. I have labelled it "mental stripping," following the lead of Janice Porter Gump, who used the approach to articulate issues concerning black women and work. Below, the approach is described briefly.

Mental Stripping

Gump's (1978) paper, entitled "Reality and Myth: Employment and the Role Ideology in Black Women," was presented at the 1975 conference, New Directions for Research on Women. As the title suggests, the paper explored the impact of expectations for woman's role on black women's work-related attitudes and behaviors.

At the outset, Gump commented on how little we know about sex role issues as they pertain to black women. She explained the route she took to understanding the issues as follows:

> My attempt to understand something of sex-role expectations, strains, and satisfactions for black women has necessitated a sort of mental stripping. I have had to attempt a kind of anthropological naivete, to assume I knew nothing of the women I was to discuss. At the same time, I had to be subjective, as my own experience and intuitive understanding were the only guides available to me (p. 352).

Subsequent portions of the paper revealed the specific features of Gump's inquiry. First, she drew on themes in her life and in the lives of black women that she knew. Thus, for example, she was able to discuss, in the absence of research findings, how black women elaborate the housewife role. Second, Gump drew on historical analyses for a perspective on how contemporary black women have come to construe their roles.

These two discussions established the context for the third aspect of the paper: a review of selected literature on two topics, employment and the contrast between myth and reality about black women's sex role orientation. Throughout the review, Gump drew on themes she had introduced earlier in the paper. In the final section, Gump wove the separate strands of the paper into a discussion of the "sense of responsibility," an attitudinal stance that Gump believes is "deeply ingrained in black female sex role ideology [and] a responsibility that includes economic provision for the family as well as provision of the more traditional functions" (p. 376).

The foregoing synopsis of Gump's paper cannot convey the power of her analysis that placed the facts and figures of black women's market experience into a psychological

context. I urge readers to examine the paper first-hand. It is an outstanding example of how the researcher's own experience can provide conceptual direction.

One area of research on black girls could be treated in a manner such as Gump's: aspirations and preparation for work and careers. A small amount of information exists on the subject, including studies that reveal the sex-role traditionality of occupational choices (Hall, 1974; Kirchner & Vondracek, 1973); black teenaged girls' low rates of participation in the labor market (Wallace, Datcher, & Malveaux 1980), the effects of teenaged nonemployment on subsequent success in the market (Corcoran, 1980); and the inadequacy of black girls' preparation for work (Roderick & Davis, 1973; Wallace, 1974). However, the data as a whole lack conceptual foci that might serve to integrate the various topics or clarify research issues that would inform educational practices such as counseling, curriculum design, and assessment of career interests. A consideration of the existing data, using the personal experiences of black women researchers as a guide, might be of use in creating a perspective for future empirical studies.

Learning from Practice

We turn now from conceptual and analytical approaches to one that consists simply of admitting to the data base information that is often overlooked. The information comes from evaluative studies of social and educational programs and needs assessments conducted in the course of social and educaitonal implementation of such programs.

I must admit that, from a practical standpoint, the task of identifying useful studies and assessments is not an easy one. Often, the reports of program evaluations are not found in the general literature. Moreover, it may take considerable preliminary work to determine: a) if a program was targeted at black girls or had a substantial proportion of black girls among its clients; b) if evaluative analyses--to ascertain the preprogram state of affairs--were conducted, with black girls as a distinct focus of analysis; and c) if there was an evaluation conducted at all, or some form of intake data collected, tallied, and reported. Sometimes, simply identifying the population of programs can be a challenge. Managers may not have the resources to prepare descriptions, or they may find documentation to be a task that interferes with delivery of services to clients. Moreover, programs often

live only as long as a funding cycle or two. They may disappear before any one has a chance to record the lessons that implementors and participants learned.

The investment required to locate information from program-related evaluation and description can provide tremendous payoffs in at least four ways. First, we can learn much from such data about subpopulations of black girls. Typically, programs are designed to alleviate the special problems of an identifiable group: teenaged mothers, chronically unemployed girls, children with low self-esteem. In the case of programs to achieve equity for black girls in schools, the "treatment" may be extended to an entire population.(2) Second, the data may be useful in testing assumptions about the needs and the strengths of the groups to be served. For example, in one baseline study of a major program to improve attitudes of inner city youth, the investigators found that program participants showed, on standard measures, few signs of the presumed attitudinal deficits (Murray, Murray, Parham, Kumi, & Gragg, 1981). Third, evaluative studies and needs assessments often examine areas of black girls' experiences that have gone unexplored in "basic" research inquiry. Finally, because programs are designed to get results in the real world, data gathered in the programmatic context can be tied intimately to matters of future practice.

To illustrate this point, I will describe briefly one study found in the ERIC literature, the evaluation of the program, "Linking Institutional Networks to Community Kinship System." This study was conducted by Eileen Kelly and her associates at the American Institutes for Research (Kelly, 1979; Kelly, Murray, Gragg, Heinsohn, and Dory, 1982).

LINCKS, a small research and demonstration project, was sponsored by the Washington, D.C. Parent Child Center (PCC), in cooperation with Cardozo High School and the American Institutes for Research. The project, which lasted three years, targeted adolescent mothers who were pregnant or parents, and who enrolled in the high school. LINCKS was based in the school--participants were assigned to a separate homeroom--and offered special services, including: day care, education in parenting and other areas of need; individual and group counseling; referrals to school and PCC services; and referrals to broader communicty services. A unique feature of the project was the use of PCC as a mediating struction for linking and integrating existing formal and informal (e.g., family, friends) resources on behalf of program participants and their children. During the course of the program, 133 students(3) were enrolled.

The evaluation included an extensive needs assessment, conducted at intake and at selected points during the demonstration; participant descriptions of support received from informal vs. formal helpers, in terms of who helped and the nature of the supports provided; and measures to tap the program's progress in improving participant attitudes and behaviors, such as school attendance and performance, self esteem, use of birth control, and setting of realistic career goals.

As one would expect--given the nature of this subpopulation--the needs were extensive and included assistance in obtaining jobs, day care, and medicaid, Public Assistance, and food stamps. It is of interest that the girls reported that they received a substantial amount of help, especially from mothers, other immediate and extended kin, and friends of both sexes. Less than 6% identified school personnel as sources of support, although help with school work typically was not provided by the informal network. The latter finding was corroborated in the girls' reports and in those of helpers that were interviewed. In view of the girls' low achievement in school (many were failing) and the girls' inability to identify educational resources in the community (e.g., alternative school programs), it might be said that the

girls' reported lack of support from the school; perhaps one of the "necessary links" in the chain of relationships that the girls need to improve their lives.

As to the ultimate question of the study--did participation in LINCKS make a difference--few conclusive answers emerged. As in many other research efforts conducted in the "real" world, problems were encountered in implementing a design that permits definitive statements about the success of LINCKS or the generalizability of the findings. Self selection and attrition, the banes of many evaluations, proved troublesome throughout the study. However, as sources of descriptive information on special subpopulations, LINCKS and other program evaluations (see, for examples, Anderson, 1979; U.S. Department of Labor, 1977; Polit, Kahn, Murray, & Smith, 1981), can be extremely useful in our efforts to develop empirically an understanding of black girls and their needs.

Conclusion

This paper discussed three different ways to advance the study of the educational needs of black girls. Two approaches are variations of the literature review. The first, as illustrated by Gurin and Gurin's paper, compares

what we have learned from experimental and correlational studies with the aspirations of practical programs to solve problems. From such a consideration, research needs to inform or improve practice can be specified.

The second, which used Gump's paper as an example, starts with personal and historical perspectives to view existing facts and identify conceptual frameworks for application in empirical studies. The third approach is descriptive, rather than analytical, and consists of examining findings from evaluative research.

None of these approaches is a substitute for gathering information through empirical investigation. Moreover, they are the kinds of activities that often are of lower priority--to funding sources and investigators themselves--than original studies. But what we know about black girls comes from a diverse set of theoretical and disciplinary frameworks; the educational implications of many of the existing findings are unspecified; and as many researchers have noted, the findings have often stemmed from studies with unrealistic assumptions about black girls. For these reasons, we need to put what we have already learned into perspective--using the viewpoints of practice and the reality of what black girls need and experience.

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